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France-Tunisia

French Premier Gaillard continues to stall for time on the Tunisian issue. He appears to be making every effort to keep cabinet discussion away from the specific terms of Bourguiba's recent proposal through the good offices mission and to concentrate instead on the possibility of resuming direct negotiations. Paris observers now are more optimistic about chances for a solution, largely on the strength of the favorable impression made on French political leaders by President Bourguiba's relatively moderate Independence Day speech on 20 March.

The success of Gaillard's delaying tactics, by which he hopes to avoid a cabinet crisis before the beginning of the vacation period on 28 March, will depend on rightist willingness to risk a showdown. Die-hards in the Independent party's right wing continue to be opposed to any concessions and they have Social Republican, Dissident Radical, and Poujadist support. Nevertheless, they still have to convince the rest of their party that Gaillard is arranging a giveaway in North Africa and his careful avoidance of specifics will increase their difficulty in securing a decision to abandon the coalition.

Even if successful in this maneuver, however, Gaillard's poor opinion of Bourguiba and the general political atmosphere in Paris make likely continued French efforts to obtain further Tunisian concessions. This may be done either through pressure on the good offices mission or in protracted direct negotiations.

Bourguiba, however, has probably already made the maximum concessions possible in the face of continued criticism that his reliance on American-British good offices has thus far proved fruitless. Unless he achieves at least partial fulfillment of his objective--the evacuation of French forces--in the near future, he probably will press for UN Security Council action. (SECRET NOFORN)

Sources: EMB PARIS 4325, 19 Mar 58 (Secret No Further Dissemination); AP PARIS, 21 Mar 58.

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